

*Statements by Ministers*

international community or the United Nations or someone else as to what should be done about this situation.

The fact of the matter is that we do not have a mechanism in the world for dealing with the existence of corrupt and undemocratic regimes. We need that kind of mechanism and we are not going to get that kind of mechanism until we have a reform of the mandate and the authority of the United Nations, which is something that Canada should be seeking, to get over this problem that presents an opportunity for superpowers to act in the way that the United States has just acted. It is not the right way to deal with these problems, to have the United States or, for that matter, any other superpower decide that they shall take the law into their own hands, which is exactly what the United States has done here. They have taken unto themselves the right to break international law when they so judge.

If we are trying to move to a world where we operate with any sort of genuine sense of international law, these kinds of things are more dangerous for that notion than they are for anything else. That is why so many of us over here are offended by it. We are not offended that General Noriega is no longer in power in Panama. We have had no use for General Noriega or his regime, or for that matter many other regimes that have existed down through the years in Central and Latin America. We have a record of opposing and being critical of those regimes which is second to none in this House. It strains credibility, frankly, for Conservative back-benchers today and indeed for the minister, unfortunately, to suggest somehow that because we have questioned the American action in this case, we are supporters of Noriega or this sort of thing. I would put the New Democratic Party's record of opposing undemocratic military dictatorships up against the record of the Conservative government, or for that matter, Liberal governments, any day of the week. We have nothing to apologize for.

• (1845)

I think it was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who said something with respect to some tinpot dictator somewhere that the United States was supporting. In answer to one of his advisers who said that this guy was a real son of a bitch, FDR replied: "Well, he may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch".

What happened in Panama was that there was a son of a bitch who decided that he was his own man. This was not part of the plan. This has not been part of the American plan for many years.

Did we hear whining and see crocodile tears about democracy in Panama for the 20 years of the military regime that preceded the elections that everyone is so concerned about now? Did we hear anything about that? Did we hear whining and see crocodile tears about democracy when the Somoza regime was in power for decades in Nicaragua? Did we hear about Duvalier in Haiti? The list goes on and on of military dictatorships which the United States has actively supported through military and economic aid and political comfort for many years.

That is the problem with this invasion. It is not that General Noriega has been removed from power. It is that we are asked to believe that the United States is acting out of some high morality in doing this. It is the rhetoric that surrounds the event which is as offensive as anything else.

What is truly offensive or disappointing, I guess, is that the Secretary of State for External Affairs does not seem to have a sceptical bone in his body about this. Perhaps he should have given just the slightest hint that maybe he does not believe everything that he is told and that maybe the United States does not have a record in Central America that deserves the kind of credibility which he has given it by his comments on this action.

The minister said that we need to have new thinking. I agree. I do not think that we can always be captive to historical events. It is not always a question of trying to assign blame for things that happened a long time ago. You give that up when you feel that the people who have been part of that history have changed their thinking. You do not just give it up for the sake of having a new thought. You give it up when you think that the people who have a record of acting in a certain way have changed their behaviour.

Frankly, it is very difficult for us here and for a great many Canadians to think that the Americans have changed their way of thinking about Central America when we have been treated over the last little while to American indifference to human rights violations in El Salvador, for instance.